

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article414>



Venezuela

**"To lead our people to full
social and economic liberation
through a complete
revolution"**

- IV Online magazine - 2005 - IV364 - February 2005 -
Publication date: Saturday 5 February 2005

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights
reserved**

In the course of his visit to Madrid at the end of last year, President Hugo Chavez had an off-the-cuff discussion with several dozen intellectuals. For two hours he responded to doubts and worries expressed by writers, actors, editors and journalists, among others, who intervened freely and without their interventions having been previously selected. Here are some extracts from these exchanges.

Pascual Serrano, who took part in this meeting with Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, published this report on the web site of Rebellion, November 26, 2004.

– How do you see the next meeting of the presidents of the countries of South America?

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/CHAVEZred.jpg>]

We have been very critical of the process of Latin American integration, which has often been a process of disintegration. It was Simon Bolivar who most forcefully expressed the geopolitical idea of a league of Latin American nations. When the first Summit of the Americas was held, ten years ago, in Miami, Clinton said that it was the coming true of Bolivar's dream - but no, in fact it was Monroe's dream, the dream of control of the countries of Latin America by the United States, that he was trying to implement.

Initiatives such as Mercosur are in reality only commercial affairs, that's not genuine integration. Until the coming to power of Lula two years ago, we felt very alone with our project of integration.

The Empire had always tried to avoid what is taking shape now: Lula, Kirchner, the fall of the neo-liberal government in Bolivia and today Tabaré in Uruguay... Even if the President of Paraguay maintains a neo-liberal discourse. The Ayacucho Summit will enable us to take a step forward, because the unity of the bloc of Latin American nations is slowly advancing.

– You have denounced the way the media treat your government and the situation in Venezuela and beyond. How do you see the situation now?

It has been terrible. As Galeano would have said, "never have so many fooled so many people". They carried out a coup d'état against me, they kidnapped me and took me by plane to an island and nobody told the truth about it. They all announced that I had signed my resignation, which was a lie, because they would have had to shoot me first.

But before the cock had crowed twice the people and the troops loyal to the Constitution succeeded in restoring the legitimate government and the constitutional order. Then a newspaper in Spain had a headline "The people overthrew Chavez and the army restored him to power." Then we had to deal with the sabotage of our public oil company, PDVSA, the heart of the Venezuelan economy. Then there was the referendum, where we won 60 per cent of popular support.

It has just been shown that the opposition resorts to terrorism, with the murder of the judge who was investigating the coup d'état. Now, the media are tending to do their job again. Criticism is welcome. We haven't closed any of the media in spite of their insults and their verbal personal attacks against me. We think that in Spain there is also an evolution in the way news from Venezuela is handled.

– What international ally supports your policies in Venezuela?

When we arrived in OPEC this country wasn't worth a barrel of oil. Until then Venezuela was the US's Fifth Column in OPEC. We met with all the countries and we re-launched the organisation. When we were suffering from the bosses' lockout that paralysed our economy, we were able to appreciate the solidarity from Brazil, which sent us oil, from Cuba, which supplied us with food and sugar, and from Colombia, which allowed us to use the ports of Santa Marta and Cartagena. Russia also sent us oil and Algeria and other OPEC countries placed technicians at our disposal.

After the failure of the coup d'état and my re-confirmation as President of Venezuela, the United States wanted to use the Inter-American Democratic Charter against me - a full-scale attack, claiming that it was I who had carried out a coup against Carmona. The countries of the Caribbean - small in size but big in dignity - and many Latin Americans stood up to the United States.

It is true that the Soviet Union no longer exists, but there are many friends in the world.

– Your system claims to be advancing towards a participatory democracy. But in the last regional elections the turnout was frankly weak, how do you explain it?

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/vene_jan_3_2003_7-2.jpg]

The level of abstention in the recent elections for mayors and governors reached 51 per cent. In the elections during the 1980s the level of abstention in the municipal elections was 90 per cent and in the elections for governors, 60 per cent. The level of abstention in the recall referendum (in August) was only 35 per cent, an unprecedented level in Venezuela.

You have to take account of the fact that in the last local elections the opposition had called on voters not to take part. Thanks to this we won twenty out of twenty-two states.

Although the turnout is very important, you can't measure participatory democracy by the number of electors on polling day. It's the participation of citizens in the many and varied daily tasks that enables us to measure it: health, land committees, volunteer armies for literacy, Bolivarian circles, study groups on water use, neighbourhood committees that define needs and the uses the budget is put to...

Democracy is measured on a day-to-day basis, not on election day. If we want to put an end to poverty, let's give power to the poor. That's why we have taken initiatives, such as the micro-bank, to give loans to those who are organising in the poor neighbourhoods.

– Looked at from Europe, Venezuelan society seems very polarised. Do you envisage an initiative to calm relations between your government and the opposition?

What is happening in Venezuela is also happening, from a mathematical point of view, in the whole world. Bush-Kerry in the United States, Zapatero-Rajoy in Spain, Lula-Serra in Brazil. In 1998 we got around 56 per cent of the vote, the opposition about 40 per cent. In 2000, with the new Constitution, we got 58 per cent of the vote.

Four years later we got the support of 59 per cent of those who voted. In 1998 and 1999 there was no social violence, there was absolute peace. However we dealt with conflict-laden questions, like abortion or homosexual rights, etc. In 2000 there weren't any tensions either.

"To lead our people to full social and economic liberation through a complete revolution"

But when we reached the year 2001 and infringed on the economic privileges of the oligarchy, a conspiracy exploded, the media began to say that yes, Chavez was a fascist, or a communist who wanted to turn Venezuela into another Cuba.

The situation was so tense that that people were capable of banging pots and pans on family outings to a theatre or a restaurant, to the point where they were forced to leave. On television officers in uniform called for an insurrection, they paid soldiers to launch all sorts of accusations against me, they went so far as to pay a pilot to say that he had transported drugs in his plane, or arms for the Colombian guerrillas...Those were the methods we had to overcome in Venezuela in order to accept and normalise political differences, like in any other country.

– In my opinion, Cuba is a ineffective dictatorship. Shouldn't you support a transition in Cuba? What can Venezuela do so that aid to Cuba transforms it into a democracy?

We are very respectful towards Cuba. We provide the same aid to it as we provide to, for example, the Dominican Republic. We have never envisaged that this aid could be conditional. Friends are friends. We respect Cuba and we have our own criteria. No one can reply to your question better than Fidel Castro.

But I will never say that what is happening in Cuba can be compared to a dictatorship. I don't possess any such certainty. Why here in Europe don't people ask the Arabs why they don't elect their presidents? In Cuba there is no illiteracy, but in countries that consider themselves democratic there is 40 per cent of illiteracy.

This subject is very delicate for me, because of my respect for Cuba and for its revolution. In my country we have Cuban doctors who work in the poor neighbourhoods. They have left their families in Havana and spend up to two years helping the Venezuelans.

Without any doubt the model of integration and cooperation that we are trying between Cuba and Venezuela is an example that we are giving to many Latin American countries. But I think that a Cuban could give a more precise answer to this question.

– How are policies of wealth redistribution applied in Venezuela? How does the state corruption that exists in the Venezuelan administration affect the Bolivarian Revolution and how do the social movements take part in the fight against corruption?

Every economic transformation must have a social effect. We have taken some steps in the course of the last five years. The recovery of the public oil company PDVSA, which was in the hands of a denationalised technocracy, cost us a lot.

When I was a young lieutenant I was ordered to search for and arrest guerrillas like Ali Rodriguez and Guillermo Garcia Ponce, who are both with me today, one as a minister and the other as director of a periodical. I realised that they were right, both concerning their struggle and their demands.

The recovery of PDVSA was a titanic undertaking. One of the managers of this company has ended up as adviser to the President of the United States, which shows who he was working for all along. They were going to privatise everything, they had already privatised the brain of the oil company, that is, the whole of the computer control system was in the hands of a mixed company whose directors were all members of the CIA.

They were a state within the state, who couldn't be held accountable for an audit or control, neither by the

"To lead our people to full social and economic liberation through a complete revolution"

government nor by the Congress nor by the Revenue Court. They began investments in the whole world that never brought a single cent to Venezuela. After the failed coup d'état and the bosses' oil strike we were able to legally dismiss 17,000 managers for abandoning their posts for two months and taking a holiday.

But the PDVSA still today owns petrol pumps and refineries in the United States which have never brought us a cent and on which we have to sell petrol at reduced prices. And we can't put a stop to this situation because we would lose in the American courts. So, I'm financing Bush. But they accuse me of financing Fidel Castro, whereas we are giving money to the President of the United States and not to Fidel.

At least we have recovered the Venezuelan part of PDVSA and we have been able to devote 1.7 billion dollars of the PDVSA budget to the fight against poverty.

Next year we will again be able to use 2 billion dollars from this budget for social purposes. In contrast, when they were in charge of the oil company they didn't pay taxes because they declared fictional expenses. They even went so far as to organise explorations for oil in places where they knew perfectly well they wouldn't find any, for the sole purpose of justifying the tax deductions.

Tax collection is another problem. In Venezuela no one paid taxes. Now we are automating Customs, because smuggling, for example, was rife.

But beyond all that, we want to go beyond neo-liberalism to bring about a state that is social, democratic and just.

– In Spain it is difficult to understand the big role that soldiers play in your government and your administration. Can you explain it?

Some people think that my government is a military government, but that's not the case. In fact the armed forces participate in our process. Our arrival coincided with the "Caracazo" (popular revolt in February 1989) in the course of which thousands of Venezuelans died, repressed for demanding more social justice. They called me a putschist, but what we did in 1992 was a civil-military rebellion.

My present minister, Ali Rodríguez, a civilian, was waiting for arms and we had planned a rising to lead the country towards a constituent period. Venezuela was then under the control of a corrupt political class. We were imprisoned after asking that there shouldn't be a single shot fired, to avoid bloodshed.

There were at that time more than forty murders in Caracas every weekend, but during the twelve hours of our rebellion there were only 17 dead - deaths that greatly distress me. When we came out of prison, we built a party and we stood in the elections. And we won, we are winning and we will win again.

You also have to take into account the social origins of Venezuelan officers. They come from the poor social classes, they are children of peasants, that's why they understand the need to get involved in a project to fight against poverty.

Appendix 1: Chavez, Trotsky and the Permanent Revolution

"To lead our people to full social and economic liberation through a complete revolution"

In his closing speech at the First Meeting of National and International Intellectuals in Defence of Humanity, December 5 in Caracas, President Hugo Chavez spoke about Trotsky and his Permanent Revolution. He said in particular: "I am in the course of reading a book someone gave me, Permanent Revolution, a formidable book, by Trotsky".

Venezuelan National Radio gave the following information about this speech: "He also exhorted the need to take up again the study of socialist ideas, of socialism's original theses, to revise the mistakes, to reorient ourselves in order to take the right direction, so as to avoid the extermination of the human race, of the planet Earth, of all life."

In commenting on this task, he said that in Moscow he had bought Trotsky's book *The Permanent Revolution*, in which the Bolshevik revolutionary explains that the problems of each country don't have national solutions, but that these problems include other peoples, a thesis that he said he entirely shared. In harmony with this supreme objective, he recalled that this Monday there will take place in this city the Bolivarian Congress of Peoples, which includes for the moment only the Latin American and Caribbean regions, but which should in his opinion be extended to the whole world. "This other summit will complete the one we are concluding here", Chavez underlined.

NOTE: If Chavez obtained Permanent Revolution in Moscow, it seems more likely that he was given it than that he bought it.

Appendix 2: Chavez - "The fatherland is Latin-Caribbean America"

During the Second Bolivarian Congress of Peoples on December 6, Hugo Chavez Frias addressed the delegates of more than twenty countries of Latin America and the world. Prensa Presidencial reported his speech as follows: "This century is for us the century of truth, in this century we will have a fatherland and this fatherland is Latin-Caribbean America.

It is time to think about it and to create it, this is taking place today and not tomorrow, let's not waste time, let's take advantage of time. We are called upon to invent it, to freely create it, to definitively liberate it for the good of our peoples. (...) "The United States of North America, said Bolivar, seem to have as their destiny to infest America with suffering in the name of liberty, that's why we must take up again more strongly the ideas of the Libertador", added the country's First Citizen.

He pointed out that the day after tomorrow in Cusco (Peru) presidents from different parts of the world will sign a declaration to "form a South American community of nations, which is a good signal, but in no way sufficient, because it is limited to a rapprochement between the Andean Community of nations and Mercosur, starting from a mercantilist vision".

He explained that it is a limitation because the integration of peoples is not an economic problem but a political, historical and social one rather than being mercantilist, and he underlined that it was politics that must open up the road so that the people may choose the directions to go in and subsequently enable the economy to play its fundamental role".

Appendix 3: Chavez - "We must leave the capitalist model behind us"

"To lead our people to full social and economic liberation through a complete revolution"

Extracts from President Chavez's speech in La Guaira, Vargas State, October 28, 2004, at the end of the municipal and regional (state) election campaign, which took place on 31 October.

"The only way, the only real way - we have to accept it and understand it better every day - to lead our people to its full social and economic liberation is through a complete revolution, an integral revolution, a revolution which must deal with the economy, that is to say a revolution which in addition to being political, must also be social, must be profoundly economic.

I will say once and for all, we must leave behind us the capitalist model that has been installed in Venezuela for such a long time, because in the framework of the capitalist model, of the capitalist economic model, there is no solution to society's most serious problems, grinding poverty and social exclusion(...)

We are going to govern over the next two years with a better level of coordination, with great efficiency and especially in order to effect a great leap forward in political transformation, in social transformation and especially - and I say this because the economy is a determining factor - economic transformation.

The capitalist model, we have said, we will leave it behind, so what will be our model, some will ask? There is here an economic model, it is contained in its broad outlines in the Constitution, a model of social economy, of popular economy, a diversified productive economy, a humanist economy because it must serve to give our people, as Bolivar said, the greatest possible happiness to everyone in equal measure and not to a privileged minority against an excluded majority. So it's in this direction that we must speed up our progress, and we will have to fight hard against the structures of the capitalist system".

Appendix 4: Chavez quotes Trotsky on revolution and counter-revolution

As I said to Khatami: "Look, Khatami, the imperialist aggression made us lose, we lost part of two years, 2002, 2003, because there we put off many projects, yet we are also gaining many things, we are gaining moral strength in the face of the world, we are demonstrating that here what is on the march is a real and genuine democracy, we are withstanding, as Trotsky said, the whip of the counter-revolution; but Trotsky said: 'Every revolution needs the whip of the counter-revolution; the whip strengthens it, provided it survives it'. We have not only survived the whips of the counter-revolutionary aggressions, but we have come out of it strengthened, as I say to all our friends in the world, in one way or another".

(Extract from the annual message of Hugo Chavez Frias, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, from the Legislative Palace, January 14, 2005).